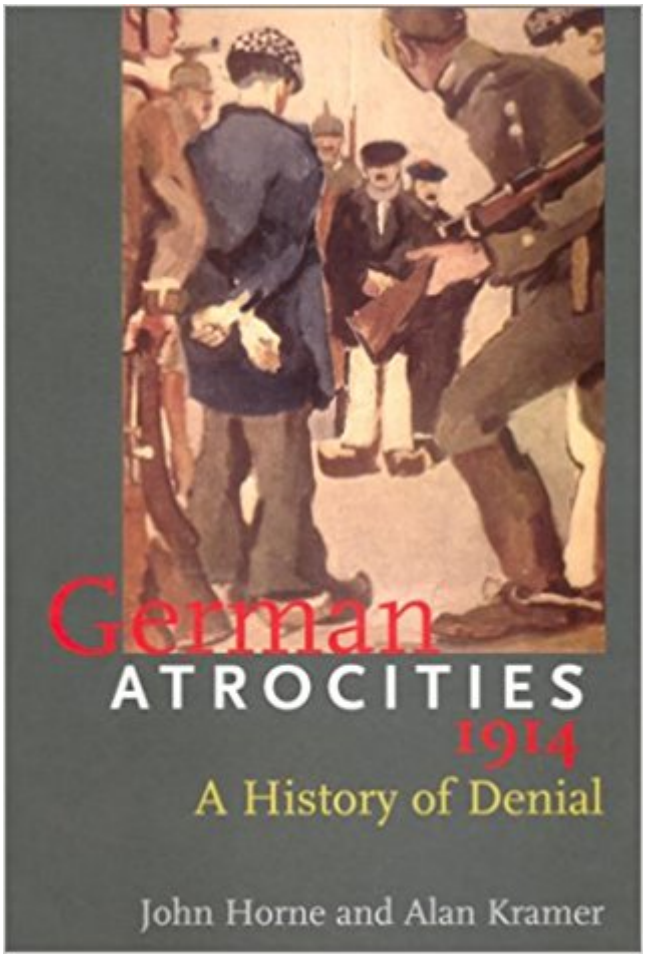
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German Atrocities, 1914: A History Of Denial



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Synopsis

Is it true that the German army, invading Belgium and France in August 1914, perpetrated brutal atrocities? Or are accounts of the deaths of thousands of unarmed civilians mere fabrications constructed by fanatically anti-German Allied propagandists? Based on research in the archives of Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, this pathbreaking book uncovers the truth of the events of autumn 1914 and explains how the politics of propaganda and memory have shaped radically different versions of that truth. John Horne and Alan Kramer mine military reports, official and private records, witness evidence, and war diaries to document the crimes that scholars have long denied: a campaign of brutality that led to the deaths of some 6500 Belgian and French civilians. Contemporary German accounts insisted that the civilians were guerrillas, executed for illegal resistance. In reality this claim originated in a vast collective delusion on the part of German soldiers. The authors establish how this myth originated and operated, and how opposed Allied and German views of events were used in the propaganda war. They trace the memory and forgetting of the atrocities on both sides up to and beyond World War II. Meticulously researched and convincingly argued, this book reopens a painful chapter in European history while contributing to broader debates about myth, propaganda, memory, war crimes, and the nature of the First World War. Winner of the Fraenkel Prize for Contemporary History in 2000

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Customer Reviews

The German invasion of France and Belgium was from the beginning linked with stories of atrocities committed against civilians. These stories became grist for Allied propaganda, in turn were

denounced as lies by Germany, and eventually were submerged in the far more hideous atrocities that accompanied WWII. But as Horne and Kramer, historians at Dublin's Trinity College, demonstrate in this seminal book, German behavior in the first weeks of the Great War was more than a passing episode. Using a remarkable range of printed and unpublished sources, many of the latter only recently available, the authors show that the German army killed over 6,500 French and Belgian civilians between August and November 1914. The atrocities began when poorly trained and poorly disciplined troops reacted to the shock and anxiety of battle by interpreting the rear-guard resistance of French and Belgian soldiers, and their own uncontrolled firing, as the acts of guerrillas. Instead of restoring order in their own ranks, junior officers themselves succumbed to delusion and authorized near-random large-scale shootings of civilians. Since German army policy imposed draconian collective penalties for insurgency, senior officers receiving reports of large-scale partisan activity responded by ordering its ruthless repression. The partisan myth thus took on a life of its own, independent of a reality that consisted of no more than a few isolated acts of civilian resistance. As time and rhetoric blurred memories, politics and the need to heal the wider wounds inflicted by the Great War were responsible for downplaying or dismissing charges of atrocities. The facts, however, remained stubborn. Brought to light here, stripped of their penumbras, they offer fresh perspectives on the German army, the First World War and, by extension, the nature of war itself: the province of horror, confusion and lies. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

From the outset of the German invasion of Belgium in 1914, there were reports of atrocities against civilians. While not denying that incidents occurred, recent historians have been skeptical of the extent of such events, crediting some reports to wartime propaganda. Horne and Kramer, history faculty members at Trinity College, Dublin, spent several years researching atrocities and conclude that they did indeed occur. As they explain, the Germans had a deep fear of francs-tireurs (snipers), a term from the Franco-Prussian War. As a result, a myth complex was generated in the German army that led to a mass delusion of civilian resistance when there was none. In fact, German units were more frequently the victims of friendly fire than of snipers. This, along with experiences in colonial wars, rumors of German wounded being mutilated, Prussian distaste for civilians, and anger at the impertinence of the Belgians in resisting, formed a deadly combination for the civilians caught in the German onslaught. This is the first English-language text to examine this issue so closely. While extensively detailed, it presents a compelling case and is highly recommended for graduate collections. Daniel Liestman, Kansas State Univ. Lib., Manhattan Copyright 2001 Reed Business

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Excellent reference work, with notes (pages 451-564), bibliographty (pages 565-595) and index (pages 596-608)

Excellent research and superb scholarship. The authors have presented an astonishing account of what actually happened and their resources are solid. One of the best books on a subject that one hopes is never lost to time and remembered always.

One of the saddest books I've ever read.I'm going to object to some of the other reviews here, in that the book isn't really, at its core, an indictment of Germany as such, but a kind of examination of what might be called 'war delusional panic' by soldiers improperly disciplined and/or controlled. By this I mean soldiers both left to their own panicky devices to shoot at anything that moves that might seem to be an enemy, and/or encouraged to perform acts they wouldn't normally commit by equally panicky (or delusional) leaders. I honestly don't care what the British did in South Africa or what the US did in the Phillippines, insofar as that really is irrelevant to this study, which isn't a study of atrocities but about the above 'war delusional panic'.I've had extensive personal experience in this kind of terrifying craziness, in the Balkans in the early 1990s, where it was shocking to see what people were willing to believe when stressed, traumatized, and scared. And it's contagious: stay in it long enough, you'll believe it yourself despite your own best efforts to resist it. This is a good book about that phenomenon.I've also talked extensively with relatives who served in the US Army WWII in Europe, and they were full of wild tales of civilian ambushes, poisonings, nighttime murders... all of which were utterly anecdotal and patently untrue! But decades later they all still believed them. Another friend is from Pancevo, Serbia, the site of a completely unprovoked massacre by the Wermacht during the invasion of 1941, which itself was fueled by the usual whacked-out tales of the usual civilian treachery. German sources denied the massacre for decades, until a Wermacht cameraman on the scene at the time produced actual footage of the massacre from his closet in Germany, and touched off a storm of controversy. It may sound bizarre, and immoral, but I personally think a lot of the denial isn't really about amorality or anything, but shame and embarrassment at having believed such a load of crap, and doing terrible things, while scared half out of one's mind. It's scary stuff, and terribly sad.I'm giving it 4 stars not because it's not a good book about a very touchy (obviously) subject, but because I intensely dislike the title. It's inflammatory and doesn't really describe the contents accurately.

German atrocities, 1914: A history in a centrifuge.... The authors have managed to reduce the period to isolate German transgressions, avoid the similar transgressions of contemporary European empires and the US (which strips away overall historical context and legitimacy) and present their arguments to appeal to modern moral principles of warfare. The authors also play on the history of the Holocaust by indirectly implying that prior events and 1914 demonstrate a "history of denial" that was the precursor of what was to come, thus leveraging the Holocaust and adding what appears to be plausibility to their research.I see the pitfall of bias in this book:Confirmation Bias- This bias is a tendency for people to prefer information that confirms their preconceptions or hypotheses, independently of whether they are true. People can reinforce their existing attitudes by selectively collecting new evidence, by interpreting evidence in a biased way or by selectively using existing information.German excesses/atrocities in 1914 had nothing to do with what came later and there is no connection. Each European power and the US in the same time frame that Germany is examined engaged in similar atrocities in various parts of their respective empires. The authors attempt to write a narrative that not so subtly suggests or implies that there is a specific German history of atrocities that involves a proclivity within Germans to perpetrate them. The Germans acted no differently than their US and European contemporaries during the period examined, yet that information is not provided and the relevant context is not developed.The underlying message of this book? The Germans have it in their genes to be barbaric and the Holocaust was no accident.The Holocaust happened, no denying that and thousands of books have been written to document it....but the authors of this book are very wrong in trying to take a shot at German national character and this book is very misleading.

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